

SPOTTED IN KILDARE!

Our own GILL PAVEY went along to the second Irish Carriage Dog Trials, along with trial “virgin” Dalmatians six year old Deccy and eleven month old Dizzy to enjoy a very different day out.

Photos by Paul Tester

As regular readers will remember, the inaugural Irish carriage dog trials were held last September and this year the trials were held over the weekend of 16th/17th April. A change of date and a change of venue this time to the Kilkea Lodge Farm in Castledermot, Co. Kildare, by kind permission of the owners Marion and Godfrey Greene. As I drove down early on the first morning there was patchy drizzle and I was glad I had remembered my wellies; an unpromising start weather wise. The Saturday was trials day itself with the following day reserved as a fun/training day. As I arrived I have to admit to a small lump in my throat as I saw lots of Dalmatians, horses and carriages, some being prepared, others having a practice. It was marvellous to see Dalmatians doing what they were used for originally, and doing it so well - you can look at hundreds of photos but they are no



We're ready - hurry up in there!
Carriage dogs “willing to work”

substitute for seeing the real thing. There was a good contingent over from Britain where this activity started some years ago – in fact I went to the very first trials over there – and a few faces I knew from the show ring. Knowing that my involvement wasn't scheduled until the afternoon, I walked Deccy and Dizzy quietly in the background watching the preparations for the task ahead.

The regulations for carriage dog driving are set out by the British Carriage Dog Society (BCDS) in the UK and include important health and safety considerations including minimum ages for dogs, horses, drivers and grooms and all turnouts can be subject to inspection to ensure suitability and safety. Although it is an event for pure bred Dalmatians pedigree papers are not required - in fact a good number of carriage dogs are rescues - however bilaterally deaf or blind dogs, bitches in season or those with unsound temperament may not participate or even be allowed at the venue. Patches, unusual coloured spotting or blue eyes are not a hindrance but the dog needs to have plenty of heart room and be basically sound in construction to take on what is perhaps the Dalmatian equivalent of a marathon. The endurance element of the trials can involve distances of up to 40km so the two vets – one for the horses (John Cushen) one for the dogs (Dermot Sparrow) – were on hand through the day to check over each entry before they went out and on their return. In addition, in the case of the silver and gold tests of 20 km and 40km which were the two distances being attempted on this occasion, checks were also carried out at the halfway point to ensure that horses



Anne Dickens partnered with Sarah Mullins' Yanto and her Dalmatian Fenris in one of the obedience tests.

and dogs were still fit to continue without strain or discomfort. Since the trials aim to test the obedience as well as the endurance qualities of the Dalmatian, all entrants were required to complete a basic obedience test with their dog, either with a mounted handler or a carriage, as part of the trials and as an added twist there was a delightful Greyhound bitch called Julie, owned by Linda Andrews, on hand to provide a “distraction dog” and with enticing scents of local wildlife on the ground, it was all too much for at least one Dalmatian! This was held in a roped off area well away from the other comings and goings, and to avoid the possibility of “distraction spectators” as well as the distraction dog!



Alison Burgess and Tally, with Dawn O'Donnell driving Lady.

This is not particularly a spectator sport and the newcomer can find the different sections, often held at the same time, a little confusing. The classes scheduled may also look puzzling with



different definitions used but a “road dog” is one that works alongside a mounted handler and a “carriage dog” is, logically, one that works alongside a driven carriage. Phrases such as “willingness to work” (Carriage Dog Test) and “turn of speed” (Road Dog Test) illustrate how well the obedience elements are relevant to the role of the carriage dog.



Robert Tapson and Codot, driven by Marj Doyle with Beauty

The weather cleared up during the morning and we even saw the sun a few times as I walked Deccy and Dizzy around the horsebox area. Looking across the fields it was possible to glimpse carriages in the distance as they made their way round the course. Deccy, a retired showdog, was thrilled to be having a day out and his nose rarely lifted from the ground for the first hour, then some sandwiches appeared which he found extremely interesting. This didn't auger well for his level of concentration later when he would be required to follow a carriage for the first time in his life! Dizzy, being still a puppy, bounced around with eyes on stalks, so many new spotty friends and horses to greet. Luckily they are both used to horses, living in a rural area surrounded by fields of ponies all summer although Dizzy's recollection was likely to be a little hazy! The atmosphere was very relaxed and although I knew most of the Irish Dalmatian owners, the visitors were helpful and keen to initiate a complete novice and good humour was the hallmark of the day.

Deccy was a little wobbly and weaved around to start with, then he suddenly understood what to do and clicked into it like a pro.

The horse went into a trot and made several turns and Deccy maintained his position, it was amazing to see him “working” and just goes to show how an old dog CAN learn new tricks! To finish, he had to do a sit-stay positioned at the rear of the carriage clear of the wheels while I stood at the horses head until told to return, which he did. With the judge declaring him a “pass” I swapped him over for Dizzy, who has only had ringcraft training, and we went through the same process. Another huge surprise to me, she took to it immediately and looked like she had done it for years, a little sticky on the sit-stay as she's never been taught that, but at the third attempt she stayed sat! So, both passed and were awarded their Instinct Certificate. I was delighted when Eddie O'Connell, who had driven up from Cork, ran his two later in the afternoon and both passed, so well done to Cosmo



...carriage dog trials at top level require a fit, sound dog...



Maura Reade driving “Widget” with Domino in position, Domino achieved the Gold award and was also best conditioned dog, Widget was declared best conditioned horse.

The time grew near for the Instinct Certificate test and I entered Deccy and Dizzy, opting to take Deccy first. Donning a borrowed hard hat and a long rope lead rein for Deccy, I was introduced to judge Tim Stafford who explained what we were required to do. The instinct test is available for dogs who are new to this sport, to establish whether or not the dog has a natural instinct to follow the carriage before formal training commences, if the dog shows aptitude. The first step was to walk Deccy behind



Ali Rummey with Demi, who achieved the Silver Carriage certificate. Hazel Hughes is driving Tom.



Class	Dog	Handler	Award
Carriage Dog Gold	Domino	Maura Reade	Qualified, best condition dog and horse
Carriage Dog Silver - Groom Handler	Tally	Alison Burgess	Qualified
Carriage Dog Silver - Groom Handler	Codot	Robert Tapson	Qualified
Carriage Certificate - Silver	Demi	Ali Rummey	Carriage Certificate - Silver
	Deccy, Dizzy	Gill Pavey	Instinct certificate
	Cosmo, Eve	Eddie O'Connell	Instinct certificate

The main results from the trials day. Also participating were Anne Dickens with Fenris and Andrea O'Donnell with Ruby. Well done to everyone.



Andrea O'Donnell with Ruby undergoing a training exercise, with Maura Murphy driving Frankie.

and Eve too – also “show” dogs”! What a shame the official photographer Paul was busy elsewhere! After such a startling performance, as far as I was concerned, I am very tempted to go in for carriage dog activities at some point in the future and Tim was very encouraging.

On to the real business of the day, and with an entry in the Gold award for the first time in Ireland there was a small piece of history made when Maura Reade from Carlow achieved this. Huge congratulations to her and her dog Domino, who went on to win the best conditioned dog. To complete the day, “Widget” who had pulled the carriage for 40km on the Gold course, won the prize for the best conditioned horse. I don't think he even broke into a sweat! Maura's turnout was immaculate with both driver and groom handler Celia Gilbert in matching outfits which complemented the dog perfectly. In the Silver category, Robert Tapson and Codot who

A wonderful day for Maura Reade, not only achieving the Carriage Dog Gold award but also the prizes for best conditioned dog Domino, and best conditioned horse Widget as judged by the two vets on the day. Celia Gilbert, holding Domino, was the groom handler.

A proud moment as I collect Deccy and Diva's Instinct Certificates from Judge Tim Stafford. Eddie O'Connell's dogs Cosmo and Eve also passed.



had qualified as Carriage Dog Bronze at the previous trials, achieved the Silver this time, as did Alison Burgess, Chairman of the BCDS who had made the trip over the water with Tally. Tackling the Carriage Certificate (Silver) was Ali Rummey with Demi, driven by Hazel Hughes and Tom.

Mention must also be made of some of the behind the scenes people without whom the day would not have been possible. As well as the two vets John Cushen and Dermot Sparrow who did a great job of checking over all the four legged trialists and judging best conditioned horse and dog, there were two stewards - Paul Stacey and Mick Kilgallon who, amongst many other duties during the day, ensured that there was plenty of water available for the animals both at the “home” location and at various checkpoints out on the endurance course. Proprietors of Kilkea Lodge Farm Marion and Godfrey Greene were around all day with suitable transport to ferry people and supplies where they were needed and were acknowledged accordingly at the prize giving. Last but my no means least were Marie Bailey manning the Secretary's tent, and Andrea O'Donnell who did much of the setting up to ensure that the event ran smoothly and organised a well supported tombola as well.

I left at 5pm, surprisingly tired but most went on later to enjoy a meal together. It was a most enjoyable day out and I can highly recommend to anyone with a Dalmatian that they give it a try, monthly training sessions are being set up very soon, do give Maura Reade a ring to find out more. In the meantime, I have two happy dogs and two certificates which will take pride of place amongst their show rosettes, showing that the Dalmatian is a most versatile breed!

